

植民地期ビルマにおけるカレン族に対する教育の影響について

Educational Effect on Karen People during the Colonial Period

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## Educational Effect on Karen People during the Colonial Period

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In this paper, I will describe in detail the impact of education on Karen people during the colonial period. In the pre-colonial period, Karen people lacked in political support and social sophistication. The introduction of the Karen script in the 1830s was the key to the growth of literacy, spread of knowledge and education, and strengthening of the ties among Karen communities.<sup>1</sup> In 1881, realizing the significance of upgrading their lives, Karen people formed the Karen National Association (KNA). Finally, in 1937, they succeeded in getting their own new year day, national anthem, and national flag. For writing this paper, I have used the resources including the *Bulletin for Kayin New Year Festival of Shwe Kokko for the Year 2743 of Karen Era*, *Kayin Yin Kyaymu Lat Swal (Handbook for Karen Culture)*, and *Zaw Min Htut, Kaung laung Than Dhamatae Nit Aye Yeit Thar Yar Kyaung Daw Maha (Peaceful School and Pleasant Bell Hymn)*. These resources are available in the Library of the Myanmar Institute of Theology, Library of the Karen Baptist Theology, library of the History Department (University of Yangon), Department of Historical Research, National Archive, Library of St. Paul's Church, Library of Pathein, Myaungmya Karen Baptist Theology, and Ko Tha Pyu Seminary, Pathein.

### Introduction

The synonyms of the word “Karen” are “Kareang”, “Kariang”, “Karieng”, “Karen”, and “Yang”. The major groups of Karens are Sgaw and Pwo.<sup>2</sup> Especially, Sgaws are found throughout Irrawaddy delta, Tenasserim, Pegu range situated between the Irrawaddy and Sittang rivers, and the eastern hills. Pwo are largely plains-dwellers and are concentrated in the Irrawaddy delta area and northern Tenasserim.<sup>3</sup> In 1901, the population of Karens was 903,361, which increased to

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<sup>1</sup> Ardeth Maung Thawghmung, *The “Other” Karen in Myanmar: Ethnic Minorities and the Struggle Without Arms*, The Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, Inc, 2013, p.26

<sup>2</sup> Frank M. Lebar, Gerald C. Hickey, and John K. Musgrave, *Ethnic Group of National Mainland Southeast Asia, New Heaven*, CT: Human Relations Area Files Press, 1964, p.59

<sup>3</sup> Joel M. Maring and Ester G. Maring, *Historical and Cultural Dictionary of Burma*, Metuchen, NJ: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1973, p.100 (Joel M. Maring and Ester G. Maring)

1,102,695 in 1911.<sup>4</sup> Karens had neither a written language nor literature when they migrated to Burma.<sup>5</sup> Historically, they have been under the rule of the Talaing (Mon), Burmese, Shan, Thai, and the British.<sup>6</sup> Perceived as a timid and retiring race, they were despised by the Burmese.<sup>7</sup>

The social and political conditions of Karens changed dramatically in the mid-1880s with the expansion of the British empire in India. The conflicts between the British officials in India and the officials in Burma increased in the early 1800s over misunderstanding and violations of the conventions of boundaries and sovereignty. In 1824-1825, after the Burmese troops had crossed into the Indian empire, the British responded by sending troops into Burma. Entering through the sea, they quickly empowered Rangoon and marched in the north towards Konbaung capital. Unable to repel the invaders, King Bagyidaw was forced to cede Arakan and Tenasserim to the British in 1826. Some Karen people quietly supported the British campaign, even providing guides for the British troops. Karens felt that their situation could improve only if the Burman rulers were removed.<sup>8</sup> The Burman officials had permitted a few American missionaries to live in Lower Burma before the Anglo-Burman war. However, after the British gained control on Arakan and Tenasserim, a number of American missionaries established themselves in the areas having British stronghold.

Before Karens embraced Christianity, they were degraded as illiterate savages, who dwelled in inaccessible mountains, were perpetually at war among themselves, and were terrified by Burma that they fled.<sup>9</sup> In the early 1800s, Karens in Lower Burma were subjected to a fixed head tax, which was often used to compile a list of the conquered people. This tax was later imposed on the Talaing (Mon) as well. Unlike the Burmese and the Talaing (Mon), who had developed a written language to convey Buddhist teachings, most Karens remained illiterate. They needed more time to catch up with the Burmans in the fields of education and development. In the precolonial period, Karen villages were often exploited because of the lack of political

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<sup>4</sup> *Census of Burma*, Vol. IX, Part I, Rangoon, Superintendent Government Printing, 1911, p. 206 (*Census of Burma*, Vol. IX)

<sup>5</sup> Helen G. Trager, *Burma Through Alien Eyes*, New York-Washington: Frederick A. Praeger, Publishers, 1966, p.213

<sup>6</sup> Joel M. Maring and Ester G. Maring, p.100

<sup>7</sup> Edward Norman, Harris, *A Star in the East: An Account of the American Baptist Missions to the Karens of Burma*, London & Edinburgh: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1920, p.17

<sup>8</sup> During that time San C. Po thought like that; although I'm not sure if all Karen people thought in the same way as him.

<sup>9</sup> W. Purser, *Christian Mission in Burma*, Second Edition, Westminster, Society for the Propagation of Gospel in Foreign Parts, 1913, p. 28 (Purser, Christian Mission)

power and social sophistication.<sup>10</sup>

When Karens pleaded for the *Book of Life*, Reverend Jonathan Wade, a Christian missionary, dedicated himself to give the book to them. By February 1832, Wade developed an alphabet for the Sgaw Karen dialect, chiefly using Burmese letters for which types were already available.<sup>11</sup> In 1834, the missionaries developed the Karen script based on the Burmese script and translated the Bible and other Christian literature into this script. The missionary schools introduced primers in the Karen language to educate young Karen boys and girls. In 1853, the British seized the whole of Lower Burma. Many Karens in Lower Burma felt relieved to be under the British administration. The missionaries started setting up not only churches and seminaries but also primary and secondary schools followed by hospitals.<sup>12</sup>

### Introducing Newspapers in the Karen Language

The Christian missionaries, with a strong zeal, tried to improve the living standard of Karens by introducing newspapers in the Karen language. In 1881, a weekly newspaper was regularly published in Bassein by the Roman Catholic Mission, following which numerous papers were started. The principal newspaper in the region was the *Bassein News*, which was printed twice a week and had a circulation of about 600. In 1883, a weekly newspaper called *Dawkalu News* in the Sgaw Karen had a circulation of 1,000. This newspaper included politically sensitive articles and fostered the Karen nationalism.<sup>13</sup> In 1890-1891, two periodicals—the *Dawkalu News* and *Weekly Advertiser*—were being published in Bassein, the former by the Sgaw Karen Baptist Mission and the later by the Roman Catholic Mission.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>10</sup> San C. Po, *Burma and the Karens*, London, Elliot Stoke, 1928, pp.ii, iii. (San C. Po)

<sup>11</sup> *Burma Baptist Chronicle*, Book. II, edited by Genève Sowards and Erville Sowards, Rangoon University Press, 1963, pp.306, 312 (Baptist Chronicle, Book. II)

<sup>12</sup> San C. Po, pp.iv, v

<sup>13</sup> *Burma Gazetteer, Bassein District*, Vol. A, Rangoon, Superintendent Government Printing, 1916, p.128 (Bassein District, Vol. A)

<sup>14</sup> *Report on the Administration of Burma for the Year 1890-1891*, Rangoon, Government Printing, 1891, Appendix.

## Formation of the Karen National Association

In 1881, one of the Karen national leaders, Dr. Theodore Thanbyah, founded “The Karen National Association” or “Dawkalu”<sup>15</sup>. This political organisation was founded to utilise the prevailing clannish spirit of Karens in bridging the gap between the Christian and non-Christian Karens and to unite various Karen language groups. Its objectives were to facilitate Karens’ understanding and co-operation with the British rulers, promote education and self-help in social and economic advancement of the emerging nation, and protect the Karen groups against any future threat of the Burman domination. The Christian Karens provided educated leadership to KNA and contributed to its programs.<sup>16</sup> In every district, KNA’s branches were set up. Thanbyah became the first chairman and U Loo Nee, a rich person, the secretary of this organisation. Thanbyah, who was born in Kyonelar village of Bassein, in 1842, went to the United States where he had to work to support his study. In 1871, he obtained his Bachelor of Arts degree from the Rochester University and two years later got Master of Arts degree.<sup>17</sup> In 1874, Thanbyah returned to Burma and worked as a teacher in Pegu Karen School. For the Rangoon Karen Home Mission Society, he wrote 25 books, including Sgaw Karen-English dictionary. In 1885, Reverend Nichols appointed Thanbyah as the principal of the Bassein Sgaw Karen High School besides making him the president of KNA. Six months later, with a desire to devote his life for Karens’ association, Thanbyah quit his school job and the position at the Karen association. He started compiling religious literature and earned his Honorary Doctor of Divinity Degree in 1918.

From 1906 to 1920, Dr. Myat San was the president and U San Lone the secretary of KNA. After Myat San, Dr. Boe Sae and Saw Sydney Loo Nee headed the KNA. In 1925, Sir San C. Po became KNA president.<sup>18</sup> From 1930 to 1940, Sayar San Baw (OBE, KIH) was KNA chairman. It was Sayar San Baw, who, along with others, planned for creation of the national flag for Karen people.<sup>19</sup> Born in Tharyawaddy in 1878, Sayar San Baw had a normal schooling. After graduation, he became a teacher at Tharyarwaddy American Baptist Mission School. In 1924, he became an

<sup>15</sup> Maung Sin Kyal, *Myanmar Pyi Chit Kayin Amyothar Kaung Saung Myar* (Karen National leaders who love Myanmar), Seik Ku Cho Cho Press, 2014, p.39 (Karen National leaders who love Myanmar)

<sup>16</sup> John F. Cady, *A History of Modern Burma*, Cornell University Press, 1960, p.138 (A History of Modern Burma)

<sup>17</sup> *Karen National Leaders Who Love Myanmar*, pp.44, 46, 49,50, 79

<sup>18</sup> *Karen National Leaders Who Love Myanmar*, p.79

<sup>19</sup> *Kayin Yin Kyaymu Lat Swal (Handbook for Karen Culture)*, Yangon, Katha 2000 Cultural Committee, 1996, p.238

advisor to Tharyawaddy District Municipal and Tharyarwaddy District Hospital; and a member of the prison administration in 1928. Owing to his prominent activities, Sayar San Baw became a member of the Upper House of the State Legislature and the president of Tharyawaddy district Dawkalu. Later, he was also made the president of the Dawkalu. Like Sayar San Baw, the other members of the Upper House of the State Legislature were San C. Po and Mahn Shwe Ba.<sup>20</sup>

### Karen National Association in Bassein

San C. Po was also prominent in promoting the social welfare of Karens. In 1915, he established the Karen National Association in Bassein. Before KNA had its own building, the association's meetings were held at his house. In 1917, with the help of the donation received from U Tha Myat Kyi of Begayet and by using old timber from Sgaw Karen High School building, KNA's building could be made. The activities of the association included holding lectures, debates, music programmes, social gatherings, and games. The officials in Bassein were invited to attend the association's activities and requested to deliver lectures on the subjects of their interests. The main objective of the association was to promote cordiality, understanding, and cooperation between the governing and governed. The second purpose was to promote acquaintance between Karen officials and Karens so that people could apprise the officials with their difficulties and get help. "Union is Strength" was the motto of the association.<sup>21</sup>

In 1915, San C. Po was appointed to Burma's legislative council when its membership was expanded from seventeen to nineteen. Although the legislative council played a purely advisory role to the British governor and served primarily foreign and commercial interests, Karens were proud to be represented. In 1930s, San C. Po and other Karens, who had begun to advocate the nationalist idea, were all educated Christians. They generally linked their appeal for the creation of a separate Karen nation to the fact that they were civilised, educated, and advanced enough to govern their affairs themselves. Having learned to read and write through the church, they were eager to set up their own administration.

Throughout the 1920s, the Burmese nationalists' demand for self-rule spread widely among the population of the country. A number of educated Karens, including San C. Po, felt

<sup>20</sup> *Karen National Leaders Who Love Myanmar*, pp.92, 93, 94, 95

<sup>21</sup> Saw Victor San Lone, *San C. Po: Apologist for the Karens*, (A thesis for the degree of BRE, Myanmar Divinity School Insein, 1964), p.44. (San Lone, San C. Po)

differently. Selected as KNA president in 1925 and also serving as a representative in the legislature, San C. Po was able to promote his views.<sup>22</sup> In 1928, San. C. Po took the cause of his people to London where he left a record in his pleading for establishing a Karen state in his book *Burma and the Karen*, published in London.<sup>23</sup> San C. Po believed that Burmans could not yet be trusted to respect minority rights. San C. Po and many other Karens felt that Karens had been able to advance socially, politically, and economically only under the British. They were worried that if powers were transferred and Karens came under the majority Burmese rule, Karens would lose everything that they had gained. Like other KNA leaders, San C. Po was also concerned about the future assimilation. Many Karens in the Irrawaddy delta could not yet speak the Karen language and educated Karens feared that in future, if education was handed over to Burmese politicians, Karen missionary schools would not be treated favourably. Moreover, if the judicial system was dominated by Burmans, Karens worried that they would not be able to get a fair trial. Karens who could not speak the Burmese language well would be at a particular disadvantage.

San C. Po enjoyed the admiration of many fellow Karens and British colonial administrators. He was the only Karen ever to be knighted by the British. In 1924, he was awarded the title of “Commander, British Empire” partly because of his great efforts to recruit Karens to fight for the British in World War I. In 1934, he was given the title of “Sir” for his continued contribution to the colonial administration.<sup>24</sup>

### **Karen National Flag, National Anthem, and National Day**

During Sayar San Baw’s tenure as KNA president, the association made a petition to the Parliament for creation of the Karen National Flag and National Anthem. In 1936, during the administration of Dr. Ba Maw’s coalition government, the members of the Parliament who represented Karen nationals, following the KNA decision, demanded the declaration of the Karen New Year Day (Karen National Day). Finally, the resolution on Karen National Day was signed by twelve Lower Parliament members and three Upper Parliament members. In addition, the Karen National Anthem and Karen National Flag were also officially adopted by the Parliament after voting on 2 August 1937. When the demands were conceded, all Karen people were invited

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<sup>22</sup> San C. Po, pp.xii

<sup>23</sup> Gen. Smith Dun, *Memoirs of The Four-Foot Colonel*, Cornell University Southeast Asia Program 1980, p.66

<sup>24</sup> San C. Po, pp.xii, xiii, x, xviii

to participate in a competition to design the new flag.<sup>25</sup>

More than one hundred designs for the flag were received from Karens throughout the country. KNA initially shortlisted twelve designs of which three were eventually selected for finalization. Of them, Minister Mann Ba Khin's design that included Hpa-si<sup>26</sup> (Karen Bronze Drum) won the first prize. According to him, the ancient Karen people used a frog drum during the war and venerated it. Karens believed it to be a living thing. The second winner, Sayar Moe from Taungoo, incorporated the symbol of the rising sun. Giving the reason for including the rising sun in his design, he said the sun gave bright light to all Karen people in the world and that it could erase fear. For instance, if a person in a particular family fell sick, the family members get worried, especially at night. That fear disappears at the day break, when the sun rises. Thus, the sunlight gives life to all the living beings. All human beings needed sunlight and even doctors could cure patients by exposing them to sunlight as a medical treatment. The third selected design, which was made by Dr. Ba Saw Dwe, incorporated the image of a white elephant on a frog drum. According to him, the white elephant specified a precious treasure.<sup>27</sup>

Mann Ba Khin, KNA secretary, led a group to incorporate all the three elements into the final design, which he sent to KNA for sanction. In the flag finalized by KNA—

- red represented heroism and perseverance;
- white displayed purity and clarity;
- blue expressed honesty and peace;
- the nine rays of light streaming from the rising sun indicated nine regions from which Karen people traced their origin; and
- frog drum symbolized unity in the traditional Karen culture.

Before Burma gained its independence, Karens held the New Year Day celebrations in Rangoon. The requests for designating the New Year Day, National Song, and National Flag were submitted to the Parliament by KNA under the chairmanship of Sayar San Baw. KNA leaders ratified the song written by Saw San Ba and composed by Saw Thar Aye Gyi as the National Anthem

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<sup>25</sup> *Bulletin for Kayin New Year Festival of Shwe Kokko for the Year 2743 of Karen Era*, Myawaddy, p.10 (Bulletin for Karen New Year Festival of Shwe Kokko)

<sup>26</sup> Hpa-si or frog drum is not actually made of the skin of frog. It is named Hpa-si as some small statues of frog were surrounded on the bronze drum face.

<sup>27</sup> *Bulletin for Karen New Year Festival of Shwe Kokko*, p.10



for Karens and submitted to the government. The following is the meaning of the Karen National Anthem in English:

To all the we Karen People;  
 We love you so much;  
 Since you're the best of all;  
 You love and cherish the honesty;  
 And you are the hospitable people;  
 We love and cherish;  
 All the good characteristics and qualities of yours.

Saw San Ba, who wrote the words of the Karen National Song was born at Kyayo village in Maubin, in 1893. He graduated from Judson College and died in 1942. Saw Thar Aye Gyi was born at Magyilaha village, in Bassein, in 1902. From 1922 to 1927, he got I.Sc degree at Judson College, studied at Mandalay Agriculture College in 1928, and graduated in 1932.<sup>28</sup>

## Conclusion

Before Karens were brought into Christianity, they were degraded as illiterate savages, who lived in the most inaccessible mountains, and were perpetually at war. In 1834, the missionaries developed the Karen script. The missionary schools introduced primers written in the Karen language for educating the young Karen boys and girls. The major benefit for Karens was the promotion of education through the establishment of a Karen language school. The growing number of literate and educated Karens and their predominance in military and civil services provided them with new avenues for advancement in education, occupations, and the society. Therefore, in 1881 the Karen National Association was founded to promote the Karen culture. With the awakening of the nationalist sentiment among Karens during the colonial period, they tried to create some symbols, which could serve as their national identity. Because of the endeavors of KNA leaders, the National Flag, National Anthem, and New Year Day were proclaimed by the government in 1937. The National Anthem is a generally patriotic musical composition that evokes and eulogizes the history, traditions, and struggles of its people, recognized either by the nation's government as the official national song, or by convention

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<sup>28</sup> *Kayin National Anthem, Kayin Mirror Bulletin, 2743 Kayin Era*, Commemoration of Kayin New Year Festival, 2004, p.8

through use by the people. that they created their national flag and their national anthem. It is found that the KNA was the main organiser for creation of Karens' National Flag, National Anthem, and New Year Day.

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